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SAN CROMBIE PO

A Christian Physician of Bassein

By C. A. Nichols

IN 1886 the steamer, carrying some of the Burmese missionaries to America on furlough, brought to these shores a little Karen lad of winning disposition and cheerful mien—San Crombie Po by name. Today, thirty years later, he is the recently appointed Karen representative on the Burman Legislative Council, the *first* man ever to represent in the Council the Karen Christian community of Burma.

Missionaries sent from America and European countries realize more and more each year that at best they can do but a fractional part of the work of establishing the Kingdom of God among the millions in the unevangelized world. Increasing attention is therefore being given to the question of how best to develop on the field itself strong native leaders who shall assume the responsibility. Dr. San Crombie Po ably illustrates the power and influence many of these native Christians attain.

He was a child of rich heritage having descended on his mother's side from among the first converts of Burma who suffered persecution and torture because of their new faith. His maternal grandfather was Thara Ke, one of these earliest converts to Christianity in Bassein. I remember his telling me how he was persecuted by the officials who looked upon his em-

bracing the new religion as high treason against the government of the country. The church of which he was pastor became one of the most flourishing and well-grounded in the Christian faith of any in the association. Many of the most intelligent members of the large circle of other churches were at one time members of or are descendants of those brought up in his church.

On his father's side he inherited the energy and ability which had made his paternal grandfather a successful official as tax collector and magistrate under the Burman government. Inheriting mental and spiritual gifts and an eagerness to learn San Crombie Po was well equipped for his later brilliant career.

When it became necessary in 1886 for Mrs. Nichols to make her first return journey to America with her infant boy it was quite impracticable that I should leave the field on account of the rebellion following the dethronement of King Thibaw. One band of insurgents had killed our English deputy commissioner and burned some of our Christian villages. Our Karen Christians were taking prominent action against such bands and my presence was accordingly needed. I suggested that San C. Po accompany Mrs. Nichols, and thus he came to America.

During my furlough somewhat later he went with us to Thousand Island Park to the meeting of the International Missionary Union. He was requested to appear on the platform and give a brief recitation. With his usual readiness to comply with our wishes he at once consented, but when the time arrived he could not be found. Finally I discovered him in the rear of the auditorium leaning his head against an empty packing case looking quite pale and doleful. With an appeal to my sympathy he said he could not appear as he had "a sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach." He evidently thought I was somewhat unsympathetic because he quite emphatically reassured me that he was actually suffering in that way. However, he came to the platform and did his part effectively to the delight of all.

After two years at Colgate Academy he entered the Albany Medical College at an unusually early age, and his hours there were so packed with work and activity that his instructors often feared for his health. At one time the principal anxiously reported that the young Karen was "working himself to death, nursing in the hospital by night to pay his way and doing full work by day." This strenuous activity of his college days seems

to have been prophetic of his later life for he has filled the years to overflowing with rare versatility in achievement.

While taking this course one feature of his development ought not to be overlooked. Soon after reaching Albany he providentially met there a Christian woman of means and culture, who took him into her heart, praying with him and for him, making one of the deepest impressions upon him at this perhaps the most critical period of his life. How often a Christian woman exerts a powerful influence upon the career of a great man!

Dr. Po, the ever-busy man, would probably smile now could he see a letter he wrote after receiving his medical degree, in which he expressed the fear that a return home might make him lazy because of the warm climate. He did return home, however, and the climate apparently proved to be more beneficial than detrimental to his vigor and usefulness. He entered the English Medical service at first as an assistant in the civil hospital and soon became civil surgeon. After several years of successful service he came to consult me in regard to resigning from the service in order to take up independent practice. He wished to do so at the solicitations of his many Karen friends, and especially because the government service sometimes called him away for long periods from his family, necessitating their moving about often in places most undesirable for bringing up the children. I pointed out what he would lose in prestige as well as pension and other prospects as a government servant and called his attention to the fact that an independent practice was far more hazardous in Burma than in America. The physician in Burma must continually fight superstition, unbelief, and the inborn prejudice against foreign medicine and treatment. After careful and prayerful consideration he decided to resign and his later career of usefulness proved the wisdom of his decision. For some time, Dr. Po could find no trustworthy assistants or nurses to carry out his instructions but gradually, with his patience, tact and self-reliance, he gained the implicit confidence of the people of all classes in the community.

Now he ministers to people far and near; has trained many efficient Karen nurses; has built a splendid house for himself, a druggist hall, and a private hospital which is managed by native medical assistants and nurses. He is a prominent leader in his community, the medical adviser of many hundreds of families,

a trustee of the Sgaw Karen High School, a member of the Municipal Board of Commissioners, and now — more important than all — the new Karen appointee to the Burma Legislative Council. The following paragraph from the Rangoon Gazette summarizes briefly his career and indicates also his standing and the splendid service he has rendered his community.

The Karen Christian Community in Burma has at last a spokesman of their own race on the Burma Legislative Council. Dr. San Crombie Po is one of Bassein's best known worthies. A Karen Christian, he was educated in America, and took his M.D. degree there. He has specialized in diseases, notably cholera and plague, in the combating of which he has done yeoman service, attending among many others, with success, Rev. C. A. Nichols, when the latter had cholera, and Rev. L. W. Cronkhite, who two years ago had plague. The Honorable Dr. San C. Po is a medical practitioner of Bassein and a keen worker in the American Baptist Mission activities amongst the Delta Karens; he runs a large dispensary in the station. His activities include the Bassein Municipality, he being a member of its board of commissioners. A grandson of the pastor of the small village of Kozu, near Bassein, he is 46 years of age, and for 8 years, from 1886 to 1894, pursued his studies in America, obtaining his M.D. at Albany Medical College, New York. For a time after his return to Burma he was in Government service; as Civil Surgeon at Kyaukse and Myaungmya. He took up private practice at Bassein 15 years ago.

My colleagues in the mission work on our three mission compounds in Bassein, Sgaw Karen, Pwo Karen and Burmese, will most heartily concur with me in any words of appreciation respecting his medical and other aid to us, personally, and among the thousand pupils in our schools. As one said, "not only his medicine but his happy and cheerful manner are usually efficacious when he is called upon to restore people to health."

Dr. San Crombie Po is only one of the many Christian leaders in all lands whose abilities are being brought to the light — developed under the influence of the Gospel. When money given to foreign missions produces such results, no one can deny that it is a good investment. Are you doing your share in making possible the development of Christian leadership abroad?

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